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ABSTRACT

The problem of achieving a balanced ratio between minority faculty and minority students is discussed. Among the five difficulties seen as a result of failure to achieve a balanced faculty/student ratio are that minority students will suffer from lack of role models, counseling of minority students by sympathetic minority faculty will be more difficult to achieve, and innovation and the breaking of stereotypes will be hampered. It is contended that federally mandated affirmative action programs have largely failed to produce any of the desired results. An appeal to institutional and individual self-interest is proposed as a means to achieve a balanced minority ratio. It is suggested that once faculty members understand that the future of the programs and college units in which they work are threatened by failure to achieve a balanced ratio, motivation to bring about the necessary changes will emerge. The legitimacy of the minority status of a candidate as a factor in selection is proposed, and the Bakke case is seen as a precedent for the approach. (PHR)

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The Necessity of Achieving a Balanced Ratio Between Minority Faculty and Minority Students

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of the Illinois Association of Teacher Educators
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The Necessity of Achieving a Balanced Ratio Between Minority Faculty and Minority Students

Introduction

This article addresses a basic problem in the area of educational equity. The problem is that of achieving a balanced ratio of minority faculty to minority students. It is difficult to define precisely what "balanced ratio" means due to the nature of particular circumstances. However, for purposes of a working definition here, let us assume that it means that the percentage of minorities on the faculty would approximate the percentage of those same minorities in the student body. The problem is presented here in terms of its bearing on higher education, but the reader will easily see implications for the elementary and secondary levels of education as well.

The Problem

It is generally acknowledged that most colleges will face the possibility of a serious decline in enrollment over the next two decades. Not so widely recognized is the fact that, when the new demographic changes which are now climbing the educational ladder reach the collegiate rung, some significant variations may occur in the make-up of the college population. Clark Kerr has stated: "It is quite possible that a greater proportion of minority group members will, in the near future, attend college than of the white majority."[1] Given these changes, higher education may thus become a minority buyer's market. In which event, colleges will

have to become increasingly concerned with both minority student recruitment and retention since these will become critical factors in maintaining their enrollment and attracting additional minority students. As will be seen below, they will also have to become concerned with minority faculty recruitment and retention.

Many colleges do not presently have large numbers of minorities in their student bodies, and perhaps more significantly, they do not have many minorities on their faculties. A number of difficulties will result if these colleges do not achieve a balanced ratio of minority faculty to minority students: 1) these colleges will seem hypocritical in that they will not appear to practice the educational equity which they preach (in other words, who is teaching in these colleges will speak louder that what is taught -- "the medium is the message"), 2) minority students will suffer from lack of role models, 3) counseling of minority students by sympathetic minority faculty will be more difficult to achieve, 4) innovation and the breaking of stereotypes which could be achieved by a racial/ethnic balance on the faculty will be hampered and 5) other social, economic and political considerations of a longer range, less specific, less predictable but none the less real character will be affected. These difficulties will, most probably, have the effect of inhibiting minority enrollment and retention. Therefore, it will be necessary for colleges to work toward a balanced ratio between their minority faculty and their minority student body if the difficulties described above are to be avoided.

Failure of Affirmative Action

Federally-mandated Affirmative Action programs have not done a great

deal to bring about this balanced minority ratio. They operate on a legal basis and utilize a systems-analysis approach. They demand a showing of "good faith effort" rather than a showing of results. There is, however, a sizeable amount of resistance by majority faculty and administrative personnel to these programs, which are often perceived as forced intervention in the traditional academic process of autonomous peer selection. This resistance, coupled with the weak pro forma effort which the "good faith" principle allows, has rendered Affirmative Action programs largely ineffective.

Moral arguments have also not achieved significant results in bringing about a balanced minority ratio. Again, there is widespread resistance to these arguments because morality is seen by many as allowing for no more than a neutral kind of equal opportunity, as can be seen by the growing number of "reverse discrimination" suits in the courts. In sum, to pursue a balanced minority ratio with arguments based on law or morality would seem to be an unproductive course of action.

Proposal for a Workable Solution

No matter how idealistic people's rhetoric might be, and no matter how sincerely they might feel that they are committed to liberal ideals, when it comes to the point of action most people usually respond in a self-interested manner. Therefore, rather than appealing to legal or moral principle, a more effective course of action might be to appeal to institutional and individual self-interest as a means to achieve a balanced minority ratio. Faculty members of colleges could be brought to understand that if a balanced minority ratio is not achieved and if the attendant

difficulties described in the "problem" section of this article set in, then growth and even survival of college units or programs -- and consequently, continued employment of their present personnel -- will be seriously threatened because of loss of essential minority enrollment. Thus, where a legal or moral reason may not provide sufficient motivation to achieve a balanced minority ratio, these pragmatic self-interested considerations of institutional stability and personal job security may provide such motivation.

It therefore seems feasible that recruitment and employment should be done so as to seek to achieve a balanced minority ratio between faculties and student bodies, and that this should be done basically for pragmatic self-interested motives. This is certainly not very idealistic, but it will result in the minority balance aspect of educational equity being put on an "important to survival" basis rather than the present "nice to do, but not really necessary" one.

A final point concerning equity in the selection process might be mentioned. Search committees are often known to report that minority faculty candidates do not meet the criterion of being the "best qualified" candidate for a position. However, if a college is in need of minority faculty for reasons of balance, then a candidate's minority status should be one factor to be weighed along with such other qualifications as teaching, research, public service, education and experience. Pragmatic preference for minorities could be served in this case without legal discrimination against majority candidates by allowing extra credit for minority race, ethnicity or sex (that is, whatever category is needed on

the faculty for balance). The Bakke and the Weber decisions provide precedent for this kind of approach. Justice Lewis Powell's controlling opinion in the Bakke case mentions a legitimate state interest in an ethnically diverse student body and suggests how an admissions program might be structured to provide for this kind of diversity without violating the Fourteenth Amendment. On the basis of the arguments made earlier in this article, and on the basis of the Powell opinion, it would seem that a state interest in an ethnically diverse faculty would be seen by the Court as equally legitimate. Likewise, Justice William Brennan's majority opinion in the Weber case holds that Title VII's prohibition of racial discrimination does not condemn all private, voluntary, race-conscious affirmative action plans. Employers are free, according to the Weber decision, to take race-conscious steps to eliminate manifest racial imbalances in traditionally segregated job categories. These could even extend to employment quotas. Collegiate faculty positions have been traditionally segregated job categories. Thus, such an approach as suggested in this article would seem to be not only effective, but well within the law.

One thing is certain, no majority has ever yielded ground to a minority unless it was perceived to be in the majority's own best interest to do so. Unless a pragmatic approach to a balanced minority faculty/student body ratio such as the one described in this article is adopted, the status quo will not change.

Note

[1]Kerr, Clark. The Future of Higher Education Today. Institute for the Study of Educational Policy Monitor, 1978, 2, 1-3.